Amendment To The Claims

Please amend the claims as follows:

1.   (currently amended) A method for processing a postage refund request for a mail piece comprising:

receiving a refund request including a tracking identifier from a user system;

~~promptly~~ processing and paying the refund request substantially immediately after receiving the request and before review of the refund request to determine validity;

then determining if the refund request is valid;

if the refund request is not valid, initiating a refund error process,

[[,]] wherein,

the determination of whether the refund request is valid includes determining whether the tracking identifier has been observed in a mail stream; and

monitoring the tracking identifier after processing the refund request in order to determine if the mail piece is used after a refund payment.

2.   (canceled).

3.   (original) The method of claim 2 wherein:

the refund error process includes a fraud inquiry.

4.   (original) The method of claim 3 wherein:

the refund error process includes notifying a postal authority.

5.   (original) The method of claim 1 further comprising:

determining if the mail piece is associated with the user that submitted the refund request.

6.   (original) The method of claim 4 further comprising:

determining if a refund test period has completed; and

if the refund test period is not completed, performing another determination of whether the mail piece has been observed in the mail stream.

7.   (original) The method of claim 3 wherein:

the tracking identifier includes a 22-digit delivery confirmation PIC code.

8.   (original) The method of claim 3 wherein:

the tracking identifier includes a PLANET code and a POSTNET code.

9.   (original) The method of claim 3 wherein:

the tracking identifier includes a postage meter serial number and a postage meter postage ascending register value.

10.   (original) The method of claim 3 wherein:

the tracking identifier includes a postal ID tag.

11.   (original) The method of claim 1 wherein:

the refund request includes a user selection from a list of mail pieces.

12.   (original) The method of claim 1 wherein:

the refund request is received from the user via a postage broker.

13.   (canceled).

14.   (previously amended) The method of claim 6 wherein:

the refund test period is variable; and

the variable length of the refund test period depends upon the class of service of the mail piece.

15.   (canceled).

16.   (previously amended) The method of claim 1 wherein:

processing the refund request includes aggregating a group of valid refund requests received from a plurality of users associated with a postage broker.

17.   (previously amended) The method of claim 1 wherein:

processing the refund request includes aggregating a group of valid refund requests received from a plurality of users and sending a group refund request associated with the aggregated group of valid refund request to a postal authority.

18.   (original) The method of claim 16, further comprising:

sending aggregated refund request data to the postage broker.

19.   (previously presented)   The method of claim 11, wherein:

the tracking identifier is unique over a first period of time.

20.   (currently amended)   A method for processing a postage refund request for a plurality of mail pieces comprising:

receiving a plurality of refund requests, each including an associated tracking identifier from each of a respective plurality of user systems;

determining if each of the refund requests is valid;

for each of the refund requests, if the refund request is not valid, initiating a refund error process,

for each of the refund requests, if the refund request is valid, processing the refund request, wherein,

the determination of whether the refund request is valid includes determining whether the tracking identifier has been observed in a mail stream during a variable test period for each of the mail pieces and processing the refund request includes

sending aggregated refund request data to a postage broker, wherein the variable test period depends upon ~~the class of service of~~ <u>a tracking code lifetime period associated with the tracking identifier used on</u> each of the respective mail pieces.

21.   (currently amended)   A method for processing a postage refund request for a mail piece comprising:

providing an interactive listing of at least two selections of recent potage transactions for a user;

receiving a refund request including a tracking identifier from a user system includes receiving a selection from the interactive listing;

determining if the refund request is valid;

if the refund request is not valid, initiating a refund error process,

if the refund request is valid, processing the refund request, wherein,

the determination of whether the refund request is valid includes determining whether the refund request corresponds to a prior postage dispense operation <u>associated with the user</u> and determining whether the tracking identifier has been observed in a mail stream during a variable test period for the mail piece and wherein,

processing the refund request further comprises crediting a postage account held with a postage provider,

wherein the variable test period depends upon the class of service of the mail piece.

22.   (previously amended)   The method of claim 21, further comprising:

monitoring the tracking identifier after processing the refund request in order to determine if the mail piece is used after a refund payment,

if the mail piece is used after a refund payment, assessing a postage fee and a fine.

23.   (previously presented)   The method of claim 20, further comprising:

if any of the tracking identifiers are observed in the mail stream, assessing a postage fee and a fine to the broker.